

Locker's make or break year?

Jake Locker was the Los Angeles Angels 10th round pick this past June, and just this month the Washington Huskies quarterback signed a minor league contract with the Halos, guaranteeing Locker \$150,000 with the possibility for twice that amount if he plays baseball within three years.

I spoke to three baseball scouts this summer and two of them think Locker's upside on the diamond is that of a talent typically drafted in the first few rounds, with one of them saying "the strength, at that age, is rare, and he can really run and shows terrific natural instincts. And we know what kind of worker and leader he is from his days in football."

The third scout, formerly of the San Diego Padres, went to the walls for his current club to pit Locker's skills in both sport against one another, and baseball came out roses.

Which brings up the question: Could this be a make-or-break year for Locker on the gridiron?

-- Jason A. Churchill

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Glimpses of hope in a blowout

There's been very little for the University of Washington fans to celebrate outside of the comfort of Bank of America arena. After last night's 93-81 beating by the Cal Bears — the huskies have now equaled the win total of the 2008 Detroit Lions on the road.

Zero. Zilch. Nada. And minus the heart-breaking losses to UCLA and Texas Tech — the majority of the losses have been poorly defended, turnover infested blowouts with appalling shot selection where the team has not only been outplayed, they've also been — sorry Romar defenders — outcoached.

If you had just read the box-score, or only watched the first half of the game, there wouldn't be too much reason for optimism. The Huskies shot below 45 percent from the field, had only seven assists, and were out-rebounded by nine — not exactly the definition of how to win on the road.

If you take a look at the bigger picture (and in a year where you have zero road wins, you kind of have to) — you will see there were a lot of things the Huskies can take into the final third of the season.

First, let's keep in mind that Cal is not only arguably the best team in the conference, but a bad match-up for the Huskies. Jerome Randle is nearly an impossible matchup for both Venoy Overton and Isaiah Thomas — they just aren't big or long enough to close out on his quick release, and when forced to play close he's quick enough to blow by, as we saw on numerous occasions last night. Jamaal Boykin is another tough matchup, too big for Quincy Pondexter and Justin Holiday, too quick for Tyrese Breshers or Matthew Bryan-Amaning. Yes, they were able to have their way with the Bears at home, but it took one of the best shooting days of the year to complete the effort. The Dawgs should hope that someone pulls an early upset and Cal can be avoided in the Pac-10 tournament.

Despite the poor match-up, the Huskies were also still able to finally put together a decent offensive effort on the road. The 81 points could have easily been 90 to 95 if a few balls bounce in the right direction. Shooting 26 for 30 from the free throw line will usually help you win a lot of games, it just didn't today. There are still major concerns about the ball movement when Abdul Gaddy isn't on the floor, but it was still one of the better offensive performances of the year.

The biggest reason to have optimism though, is that the Huskies didn't give up. When the Dawgs were down by 17 with around four minutes left in the first half — it would have been easy for the team to pack it in and hope that Stanford gets the team of the snide. There was no sign of that, however. The Huskies competed for loose balls throughout the game, made a few adjustments to try and create some pressure, and at no point gave the "oh well" body language. Let's not forget about the gigantic amount of minutes being played by sophomores and juniors — with quite a few of the

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players not being regular members of the rotation last year. It would be easy for these kids to say 'wait til next year' — but last night that wasn't there, and that's something to admire.

The last six games are all winnable — in fact winnable may be an understatement. The chances of an at-large bid may have already slipped away — but there were things to take from last night's game that bode well not only for next year, but for mid-March as well.

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The Potential For Something Special

Technology has changed the way we receive the majority of our information forever. We don't bother to call people because we can



convey our feelings on a social networking website. If we need to give information as quickly as possible, we don't dial a number, we turn on our T9 or autofill on our cell phones and have it typed up faster than we could ever communicate it verbally. And we no longer get our sports just from Joe Local-TV, we get the information from our lap-tops and our phones as quickly as said information occurs.

Not only do we get that information as quickly as ever, it has become as specialized as ever, and recruiting is no exception. Numerous websites are focusing more and more on prep sports, offering their takes on who the best players are in the country, giving high school kids rankings and of course, the aesthetically pleasing stars, usually between one and five.

You're going to see the Washington Huskies class rankings vary — there have been some that have it as a top 10 class, and some that have it as low as 30.

These rankings don't tell the story of how important this 2010 class is for the Washington Huskies — nor what an amazing job coach Steve Sarkisian did assembling one of the best classes in the Pac-10.

Let's first keep in mind that this is a team that hasn't been to a bowl game in over half a decade, and just over a year ago was coming off a season of going defeated. While there still is as much history for Washington as any Pac-10 program not named USC, this history just doesn't mean as much to 17 and 18 year old kids. Coach Sarkisian had to be able to sell these kids on the ability to win not just soon, but immediately. Yes, the Huskies had an advantage of being able to

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offer playing time sooner than some of the other schools they were competing against because of unfruitful classes under Tyrone Willingham, but getting to play early and not going to bowl games isn't what these kids sign up for, they sign up to compete for conference championships and more.

And the Huskies got the good ones today. The best part of this class is not just the quality, its where the quality comes from. Nearly 2/3 of today's class came from California, and despite it being a fairly down year for the state of Washington, Coach Sark was still able to sign seven of the top 10 from the state. If the Huskies are going to be able to compete for Rose Bowls on a consistent basis, he's going to have to be able to recruit not only the in-state talent, but steal the kids from down south as well. Not only that, but we once again saw the dawgs be able to emphasize their efforts on the California kids but were still able to bring in an abundance of talent from Hawaii as well. Recruiting nationally is a great advantage, but you can win when you recruit locally and have connected resources in the right places.

The depth of the class is simply astounding as well. Everyone knows about Nick Montana, but the Huskies got quality players in every aspect of the game offensively and defensively. On offense, the interior (Colin Porter, Erik Kohler, Micah Hatchie just to name a few) the playmakers (Deonte Cooper, Kevin Smith, Jesse Callier) and of course, the leader (Montana). On defense, the interior (Sione Potoae, Andrew Hudson, Hauili Jamora), the linbackers (Victor Burnett, Darius Waters, Chris Young) and the defensive backfield (Sean Parker, Taz Stevenson and Jamaal Kearsse (though he may play wr). The Huskies didnt just address these positions with mediocre kids whom they knew were likely to sign. They went out and they worked — hard- and signed real players, with real potential. They weren't competing for the same kids Idaho or Washington State were competing for. They were going after guys that were wanted by the USC's, the UCLA's and the Cals, and they won.

These are the kind of classes that you can potentially look back upon and say were the foundations for something special. And I can't guarantee that all these kids will work out — I can't even say for sure that any of them will. But just based on the sheer depth of the class, and a general understanding of what talent is — it's very likely that we are looking at something remarkable beginning in Montlake.

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Mock Draft 2.0

1. St. Louis Rams — Ndamukong Suh, DT — Nebraska

The Rams have a lot of holes to fill, including at QB, but short of trading down and taking one, Suh has to be the pick. There's been a lot of talk about how DTs aren't typically good picks this high — recently, see how the Atlanta Falcons struck gold with Matt Ryan, while the Rams and Chiefs are still drafting in the Top 10 after taking Chris Long and Glenn Dorsey. Suh, however, is better than both of those



players. – *Jason A. Churchill*



2. Detroit Lions — Gerald McCoy, DT — Oklahoma

Detroit has two solid young safeties or Berry might be the pick here. The Lions best bet may be to trade down, otherwise McCoy makes too much sense and certainly fills a need on the D-line. Matt Stafford could always use more protection and an improved running game, so if either of the top few tackles ultimately warrant the pick here, Detroit could also go in that direction. Good thing for Lions fans — no wide receivers warrant consideration within several picks of No. 2. – *Jason A. Churchill*

3. Tampa Bay Buccaneers — Eric Berry, S - Tennessee

Tampa needs players all over the field, and could spring for an offensive tackle here. Berry, however, is perhaps the best play maker in the draft and is too good a player to pass up at No. 3. This might be the first pick in the draft that draws extensive trade interest as teams below the Bucs look for a shot at Berry, Bradford or Okung, and Tampa would be wise to listen, as they are in dire need of about eight impact players and the draft is a great way to load up on such talent. – *Jason A. Churchill*

4. Washington Redskins — Joe Haden, CB — Florida

The Redskins defense played fairly well for a 4-12 team, but the lack of success on third down kept the team on the field too long, and Haden has the ability and fluidity to be a shut down corner. Washington would love for Berry to slip to them here, and Sam Bradford is a good possibility here. But we think Mike Shanahan may take a QB in round two or three (Colt McCoy?) and give Jason Campbell another shot. – *Chris Crawford*

5. Kansas City Chiefs — Russell Okung, OT — Oklahoma State

Very little doubt that the Chiefs go OT, it's just a matter of which one they snag. Okung has as much ability as any player in the draft and has been more productive than any of the other OL options. For a team that failed with their last high pick (Tyson Jackson) and hasn't gotten optimum results out of the pick before (Dorsey), the Chiefs can't afford to take many risks. – *Chris Crawford*

6. Seattle Seahawks — Derrick Morgan, DE — Georgia Tech

Seattle could conceivably take any number of routes here, including QB Jimmy Clausen or OT Anthony Davis. If this is the way the first five picks end up, Seattle may be very active in looking to trade down (perhaps to No. 9 with Buffalo) and acquiring extra picks, even though they already possess two firsts. Davis would help fill the team's biggest area of need on the O-line, but Morgan is generally considered a better talent, and Seattle certainly needs to get better at pressuring the quarterback, having tallied just 28 sacks this past season, fifth-worst in the league. – *Jason A. Churchill*

7. Cleveland Browns — Rolando McClain, LB - Alabama

Please do not be fooled by the end of the year run — this team is awful. In spite of the two wide receivers picked in the 2nd round last year, this could be a spot for Dez Bryant, but McClain makes too much sense. McClain is a play maker from the inside position, who also brings high character to the organization, something Holmgren craves. – *Chris Crawford*

8. Oakland Raiders — Carlos Dunlap, DE — Florida

Oh, the Raiders. If there's one thing you know the Raiders covet (and no, it's not mediocre football players) it's speed and size. With Tom Cable officially coming back, you could possibly see them make a play on a quarterback — I think it's fairly safe to say that JaMarcus Russell isn't going to work out, but Dunlap is the perfect blend of

talent and risk that seems to magnetize to Oakland. – *Chris Crawford*

9. Buffalo Bills — Sam Bradford, QB — Oklahoma

Bills fans can rejoice, the dream situation has occurred — at least in this mock. Bradford has the intangibles, accuracy, and release to be Mark Sanchez with more pure arm strength. Of course, the Bills don't have near the defense or coaching staff that the Jets do, but that's nit picking. They may need to trade up to do it, and maybe they like Clausen more — but an upset would need to occur for this not to be a QB. – *Chris Crawford*

10. Denver Broncos — Dez Bryant, WR — Oklahoma State

Brandon Marshall has about as much chance of staying with the Broncos as Carlos Silva has on being in the next SI Swimsuit Issue. The Broncos defense fell apart over the last 10 weeks, but Bryant is a special playmaker. Even if somehow Josh McDaniels makes lovey dovey with Marshall, the lack of playmakers on the offensive side of the ball is enough to warrant another WR. – *Chris Crawford*

11. Jacksonville Jaguars — Jason Pierre-Paul, DE — South Florida

How this team won seven games I will never know. The Jaguars have a stellar running back in Maurice Jones-Drew, an up-and-coming receiver in Mike Sims-Walker and a somewhat-underrated coach in Jack Del Rio. But the fact this team was in the playoff race until the final week is a head-scratcher. Jacksonville had no pass rush, so we say they take the best pass rusher on the board in Paul. – *Chris Crawford*

12. Miami Dolphins — Brandon Spikes, LB — Florida

Chad Henne looks like he might be the real deal, and few teams can run the ball better than the Dolphins. Problem is, that in spite of the defense being on the field less than any other in the league they were still a terrible unit. Some of the improvement will come through the natural progression of the two rookies that started at cornerback most of the season — and they were hurt by the injury bug. But adding Spikes to the line-backing core is a natural fit — Spikes was made for the 3-4. – *Chris Crawford*

13. San Francisco 49ers — Sergio Kindle, OLB — Texas

San Francisco might have been the most confusing team to watch play last year. They were a miracle touchdown pass vs Minnesota and a last second field goal in Seattle from being a 10-6 football team, but instead finished with a mediocre record and missed the playoffs again. If there's one thing we've learned from the Mike Singletary era, it's that they are going to lean toward defensive play makers — and that's Sergio Kindle, even with the struggles this year. – *Chris Crawford*

14. Seattle Seahawks — Anthony Davis, OT — Rutgers

The Seahawks landing the draft's top pass rusher and the second-best offensive tackle with their first two picks would probably make a lot of people in the Emerald City happy. y But there are so many avenues head coach Pete Carroll and GM John Schneider can go, including QB, trade-down scenarios and even the possibility of trading up from one or both of these spots in round one to land the player they *really* want. Gerald McCoy? Dez Bryant? Russell Okung? Eric Berry? – *Jason A. Churchill*

15. New York Giants — Navarro Bowman, LB — Penn State

The Giants are another team difficult to figure out. After a hot start, the defense and pass rush that was once the main cog of a championship team struggled to get to the quarterback or cause turnovers. While Bowman does have a few character issues, the top-end speed at the outside position is something the Giants desperately need. Though it wouldn't be a huge shock to see a

defensive lineman here, either. – *Chris Crawford*

16. San Francisco 49ers — Earl Thomas, S — Texas

For the majority of the season, this looked like a top-10 pick, but still amazing value for an end who struggled to find the field. You won't find too many years where you see two safeties picked in the first half of the draft — but this year is an exception. Thomas is the perfect fit into an underachieving (and expensive) defensive backfield and can likely be counted on to produce immediately. – *Chris Crawford*

17. Tennessee Titans — Brian Price, DT — UCLA

For the first half of the year, this was a spot that a lot of people would have projected a quarterback, but with the development of, and cash-commitment to Vince Young we can safely rule that out. No team in football drafts defensive lineman as well as the Titans, and while the tackles performed to acceptable levels in the Titans' first year without Albert Haynesworth, Price makes too much sense as a replacement as the Titans look to get back to 2008 form. – *Chris Crawford*

18. Pittsburgh Steelers — Trent Williams, OT — Oklahoma

It's not that Trent Williams isn't good, it's just a matter of value. It's pretty safe to say that Williams is a right tackle after showing below average results on the left side this past year. With that being said, Williams and Pittsburgh is a perfect marriage. It allows the disappointing Willie Colon to move inside, and you can book Williams on the right side for a long time. – *Chris Crawford*

19. Atlanta Falcons — Bruce Carter, LB — North Carolina

Some people would say that the Falcons took a step back last year, but those people didn't pay much attention. While the Falcons won two less games and missed the playoffs, this was more a result of injuries and a much tougher 2009 schedule. While the offensive line could probably use some work too, adding a jack-of-all trades linebacker like Carter to replace Keith Brooking will vastly improve the defense, both this year and in the future. – *Chris Crawford*

20. Houston Texans — Dan Williams, DT — Tennessee

Lets congratulate the Texans for finally making the jump to nine wins after seemingly going 8-8 for a decade. Anyone who watched the Texans play knows they can score, but they've never had an inside presence on defense in their short history. Williams could either drop or falls based on his performance at the combine, but is probably a safe bet to go in this area. – *Chris Crawford*

21. Cincinnati Bengals — Jermaine Gresham, TE — Oklahoma State

It may sound redundant, but Gresham to the Bengals just makes too much sense. The Bengals were vastly improved last year because of their performance on defense, but too often the Bengals were unable to pick up third and mediums. The addition of Gresham — if he shows he's healthy — would open up the offense for Ochocinco and Coles, and give Carson Palmer another weapon with which to play. – *Chris Crawford*

22. New England Patriots — Ricky Sapp, LB — Clemson

The Patriots have more holes on defense than at any time in the Bill Belichick era. Some of this is due to age, but can also be attributed to some poor personnel choices and falling in love with trading down in the draft a time or two too many. Sapp has been described by experts as the perfect OLB for the 3-4 D, and essentially would be the new Mike Vrabel — without the touchdowns. – *Chris Crawford*

23. Green Bay Packers — Bryan Baluga, OT — Iowa

Anyone wondering why the Packers would take an offensive-lineman

here clearly didn't see the team play this year. While some of this can be attributed to Aaron Rodgers holding on to the ball too long, the line didn't play that well either. Baluga is listed at tackle, but has the size and versatility to slide inside — and with the injuries to Chad Clifton among others, versatility is something on which the Packers can't afford to pass. – *Chris Crawford*

24. Philadelphia Eagles — Bruce Campbell, OT — Maryland

This may come as a surprise after the trade for Jason Peters last year, but there are two things the Eagles do well; understand the theory of best player available and not settle because of similarities. The fact's are that Shawn Andrews was an average right-tackle last year, and Campbell has as much talent and potential of any player in the draft. If Campbell is not their cup of tea you could see a safety or defensive tackle here as well. – *Chris Crawford*

25. Baltimore Ravens — Aaron Hernandez, TE — Florida

My goodness, do the Ravens need playmakers. While Derrick Mason and Todd Heap have been productive players for close to a decade, the Ravens haven't been able to move the ball downfield for three years. Hernandez would allow the team such a threat in the middle of the field, and he can also run the screen pass to perfection, a staple of the Ravens offense. – *Chris Crawford*

26. Arizona Cardinals — Valdimir Ducasse, OG — Massachusetts

The Cardinals really could go a lot of ways here. They could add a linebacker to replace the inproductive and expensive Chike Okefor, or maybe a free safety as the heir apparent to Adrian Wilson. Unfortunately, the Cardinals interior line is too big of weakness to draft future contributors at other positions. Snatching up the mammoth Ducasse should allow either Kurt Warner or Matt Leinart to find their plethora of WR. – *Chris Crawford*

27. Dallas Cowboys — Taylor Mays, S — USC

There was not a hotter defense at the end of the year than the Cowboys. That was, of course, until the Vikings completely exposed a below-average secondary. Seahawk fans know as well as anyone that while Ken Hamlin can hit hard, his pass coverage skills are replacement-player level. Adding a superior athlete like Mays is a risk after a poor senior season, but the potential is too large to pass up this late in the first round. – *Chris Crawford*

28. San Diego Chargers — C.J. Spiller, RB — Clemson

We thought about giving Spiller to the Cardinals, but realized this wouldn't be fair. No one truly believes that Darren Sproles can be an every down back, and it's very unlikely that Ladanian Tomlinson can ever be an offensive force again, despite being paid like one. Spiller fits seamlessly into the Chargers offense and allows them to go 13-3 and lose in the divisional every year (sorry Charger fans). – *Chris Crawford*

29. New York Jets — Golden Tate, WR - Notre Dame

A match made in heaven — minus the USC quarterback throwing to the Notre Dame receiver. Edwards and Cotchery are decent players, but the lack of playmakers is one of the chief reasons the Jets were a 9-7 football team. Tate doesn't have ideal route running skills, but he makes plays as well as anyone in the draft. Also a guy who can line up in the wildcat position, something Brian Schottenheimer and the Jets love to do. – *Chris Crawford*

30. Minnesota Vikings — Jimmy Clausen, QB — Notre Dame

Probably the lowest spot you'll see Clausen in a mock draft right now, but there just aren't a lot of teams that match up well with Clausen. If you see Sam Bradford go to eeWashington or Seattle, than you might so Clausen go some 20 spots higher, like to Buffalo.

But for now, Clausen is a perfect fit to replace Favre in 2011 (come on, you know he's coming back). – *Chris Crawford*

31. New Orleans Saints — Everson Griffen, DE — USC

Will Smith was able to give the Saints 13.5 sacks, but they received little pressure from the other defensive lineman. Griffen would be able to step into a rotation with Smith and Charles Grant and help pressure the opponents QB. No team relied more on turnovers to succeed on defense, and while they were outstanding at the task in 2009, it would be a mistake to expect a repeat performance. – *Chris Crawford*

32. Indianapolis Colts — Patrick Robinson, CB - Florida State

The Colts have very few holes, but the depth in the defensive backfield could use some re-stocking. It wouldn't be a surprise to see the team try and upgrade the offensive line depth, as the running game pretty much evaded the Colts this season. But adding a corner as talented as Robinson this late in the draft would allow the Colts to draft line depth in the later rounds. – *Chris Crawford*

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